

Book Review

Wolfgang Zank*

DAVID SHAMBAUGH. 2013. *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*. Oxford University Press, 409 pages, ISBN: 978-0-19-986014-2.

David Shambaugh, of George Washington University, has published extensively on Chinese affairs. His newest book, *China Goes Global*, can only consolidate his reputation as a leading scholar in this field. It is based on five years research, well written and accessible also for non-specialists. He draws on an impressive range of sources, not the least numerous interviews with officials, and his results are healthy antidotes to many exaggerations which circulate in the media, but also in parts of academia.

Some observers have claimed that China will “rule the world”. For Shambaugh this is “profoundly overstated”. Approvingly he quotes Joseph Nye who states that “this magnification of China, which creates fear in the U.S. and hubris in China, is the biggest danger we face” (p. 311). In Shambaugh’s view, China has “a long way to go before it becomes – if it ever becomes - a true global power” (p.6). China’s “foodprint” across the globe is broad, but not particularly deep. Furthermore, China remains a “lonely power”, having neither close friends nor allies. Even in its closest relationships (North Korea, Pakistan, Russia) “strong elements of distrust percolate beneath the surface”. Only in some sectors does China “actually exercise global influence: global trade patterns, global energy and commodity markets, the global tourism industry, global sales of luxury goods, global real estate purchases, and cyber hacking ... Other than in these limited areas ... China does not really influence global events”. Nor does China try to positively resolve any global problems. “Generally speaking, Chinese diplomacy remains remarkably risk-averse and guided by narrow national interests”. When it comes to subjects such as Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, human rights or maritime territorial claims, Beijing becomes “hypervigilant”, but in most other issues it remains “extremely passive for a state of its size and importance”.

According to Shambaugh, the main motive behind China’s external policy is support for the country’s economic modernization. Another important aim is buttressing the power monopoly

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of the Communist Party, yet another one to guard China against security threats, in a wide sense. Shambaugh also adds the “Imperatives of History” to this list, but here for once his text becomes vague. It is important to notice that “ruling the world” is not on Beijing’s list. As Vice Foreign Minister Cui Tiankai put it in 2012: “China’s position is far behind the United States ... We have been elevated [in the eyes of others] against our will. We have no intention to compete for global leadership”. This is perfectly credible, given the point that China’s economy is deeply embedded in the world economy. This has created a strong Chinese interest in world-wide stability. There have been some bouts of Chinese assertiveness, for instance in 2009, which destroyed a lot of good-will towards China, but they do not change the general picture of a prudent and cautious policy. True, in China there is a current of what Shambaugh calls “offensive” realists. They want China to use its new power, including force “when necessary”. These circles entertain a strong sense of vindictiveness and retribution. But they also feel frustration because Beijing does exactly not behave the way they want it.

Through the modernization of her armed forces, China has accumulated “hard power” - to the worry of many of her neighbors. And in three fields she can actually project power globally. China possesses by now a significant missile force with presumably 400-600 nuclear warheads. This gives China offensive capabilities and a second-strike nuclear deterrent. China is also developing substantial antisatellite capabilities. This has alarmed many in the United States because the US military and intelligence agencies rely heavily on satellites. China is also “widely known to be the most aggressive cyber state in the world today”. In other fields, however, China has got very limited possibilities. For instance, sustained naval operations far away from China’s coasts are out of reach for a long time to come, due to a long list of lacking prerequisites, e.g. naval bases outside her territory. Beijing has repeatedly declared that it does not want any.

In the economic sphere, China certainly influences matters globally, e.g. through her strong demand for energy and raw materials, or through her export successes. Not so much as investor, some sensational media reports notwithstanding. The stock of Chinese Direct Investment is comparable to those of Denmark or Taiwan. And there are very few Chinese corporations which can operate truly globally: The three national oil companies Sinopec, CNOOC and CNPC, Huawei (telecom) and Haier (household appliances). Most other companies have at best a limited foreign presence. Their competitiveness on foreign markets remains often restricted because they, for instance, seldom hire non-Chinese managers, which limits their

knowledge of these markets. “Chinese firms ... are extremely hierarchical. This makes for ... a climate of risk aversion and disincentives to take the initiative ... Chinese tend not to adept well to flat management structures which prize decentralization and individual initiative”. This is one reason why mergers and acquisitions with non-Chinese companies often end in failure.

It is not lost on Chinese officials that China’s image is an important factor when it comes to international influence. Consequently, Beijing has invested much money in public diplomacy and campaigns of various sorts. With very little success because certain aspects of the political system impact negatively on China’s image. Putting restrictions on the work of foreign correspondents or arresting dissidents are simply actions which most people regard as unsympathetic. And as long as the Chinese media remain under government control, they cannot be competitive internationally. “We have a credibility problem”, observed Zhu Yinghuang, a former editor of China Daily. Many Chinese officials seem to have an understanding of “soft power” meaning doing propaganda or public diplomacy. But for Joseph Nye, who coined the term, and Shambaugh it is an intrinsic ability to attract others, and “grows out of a country’s culture, political values, and foreign policies”. It is mainly about a society to attract others, not a government to persuade others. Minister Wang Chen, responsible for the State Council Information Office, asked Shambaugh what China should do to improve its soft power. He answered: “Just get the government out of your own people’s way. China has an enormously talented society – just let it speak for itself”.

All in all, Shambaugh’s results may be surprising for some readers. But the reviewer thinks that even those who do not share Shambaugh’s conclusions will find his book “exciting”.